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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the rationale, techniques, and structure used to develop and implement an evaluation-accountability program for a new regional Education Service Center in Texas. Needs assessment, a critical element in this model, consists of objectively identifying the educational needs of clients and establishing an initial list of priorities. The statement of these needs in terms of behavioral or performance objectives constitutes the heart of the entire model. Phases included in the model can be classified as primarily concerned with planning and implementation. Tasks in the planning phase include stating divisional objectives, stating the performance objectives of all programs, selecting activities to achieve the stated objectives, developing a program evaluation plan, and completing the program evaluation guide. The completion of this phase results in the translation of targeted needs into viable programs to meet those needs. The implementation phase comprises actually performing the activities designed to permit accomplishment of the stated objectives. The program itself is subject to an ongoing evaluation whose major purpose is to improve managerial decisions by permitting the directors to manipulate their resources and activities to achieve the optimum output in terms of objectives attainment. (Author/WM)

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AN EVALUATION-ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL FOR REGIONAL EDUCATION CENTERS*

BY

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AN EVALUATION-ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL FOR REGIONAL EDUCATION CENTERS

--R. Jerry Barber and Charles W. Benson

BACKGROUND

In 1971, the 20 regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) in Texas were instructed by the Texas Education Agency to develop and implement an evaluation-accountability program. Each of the ESCs was charged with the responsibility of developing a program which would meet its own unique needs. Thus, Centers worked independently to produce their own evaluation-accountability programs. This paper presents the rationale, techniques and structure used to develop and implement the Region XIX ESC evaluation-accountability program.

Region XIX Education Service Center

Twenty regional Education Service Centers were established in 1967 by the Fifty-ninth Legislature. The ESCs were challenged to assist school districts with cooperative ventures ranging from long-term planning to special program implementation. The designers of the service center concept recognized the need for these organizations to serve as catalytic agents when working with both local school districts and the Texas Education Agency. Consequently, each ESC is governed by its own board. This governing structure, independent of local or state domination, permits a service center to remain on the "cutting edge" of professional developments while, simultaneously, retaining an active involvement in practical problems faced by schools.

Region XIX Education Service Center, located in El Paso, provides comprehensive and diverse educational services to public, private and parochial schools in the far western part of the state. Among its clients are twelve public school districts, numerous non-public schools,

over 100,000 students (K-12) and more than 5,000 educators. The Center also cooperates with The University of Texas at El Paso and the El Paso Community College in a number of efforts.

For reasons earlier alluded to, Region XIX found it desirous to establish and maintain a variety of funding sources--local, state and federal. Local funds are available only if schools within the region choose to participate in the Service Center. Membership in the ESC is strictly voluntary. However, since Region XIX's beginning, every school district in the area has retained an active membership in the Center.

State monies have been available to the Center under two funding procedures: (1) dollar-for-dollar matching of local contributions; and (2) contracting with the Center to conduct special state-supported programs. Programs supported via the contractual method include Crime and Drug Education, Environmental Education, and numerous curriculum development and implementation efforts.

Region XIX has been the most active ESC in the state as far as cooperating in federally funded programs. Specifically, the U. S. Office of Education has awarded the Center grants for conducting a Career Opportunities Program, Kindergarten Personnel Training Program, Special Education Personnel Development Program, Educational Leadership Program, and an Early Childhood Education Program. In addition, funds from Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have been awarded Region XIX to develop innovative programs, experimental school operations and supplementary service functions.

A major commitment of Region XIX is to identify and react to the educational needs of its clients, Once needs are identified,

the Center assumes a leadership role in developing strategies which will meet those needs. Typically, the strategies have included providing consultative assistance to educators, conducting special topic workshops, developing curriculum and multi-media materials, and contracting with schools to provide special services in areas such as driver education, data processing, and special education. As indicated, the ESC places a premium upon seeking solutions to the "real" problems confronted by practicing administrators, teachers, counselors and other educators. This task mandates that staff members be aware of research findings in the field of education and be able to translate these findings into practice. In addition to keeping up with research developments, a significant amount of research is conducted by the Service Center.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

Introduction

The inclination to look toward education as the conservator of heritage and healer of social ills has long been an American tradition. Never has our society relied heavier upon educational institutions to meet public needs than it does today. All signs indicate this tendency will continue to grow. Recently, however, the need to justify the faith placed in education has become apparent. Educators are increasingly being called upon to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of their organizations. The accountability movement is an expression of the public's demand that educational agencies provide evidence they are indeed meeting their obligations (Alkins, 1972).

Region XIX Education Service Center accepts the proposition that all public institutions should be accountable for their performance. We

can no longer justify programs and activities on the basis that all educational endeavors are inherently good! We must demonstrate a willingness and a capability to scientifically test the hypotheses upon which we operate. We must "prove" our programs are achieving desired results! This posture dictates that the Center develop and maintain a systematic procedure for determining its goals and objectives, developing and implementing its programs and evaluating its successes and failures.

Recognizing the above, Region XIX developed and is presently testing an evaluation-accountability model. A number of factors were considered in the development of the model. First, it was desirous that the paradigm be conceptually "tight." That is, the logic upon which it is based should be clear and easily defensible. The design should "make sense." Second, the model should be flexible. It should be capable of systematically handling contingencies which were not originally planned. Third, it should comprehensively address the topics of evaluation and accountability and yet, be "usable" by individuals untrained in those areas. Fourth, the model must have the capacity for generating accurate and timely information to be used in decision making. Program evaluation, for example, is ongoing; it is not terminal (Stufflebeam, 1971). Program directors must be able to use evaluation results to improve performance and not simply to comply with reporting requirements.

The Region XIX evaluation-accountability model serves as the vehicle for: (1) optimizing the linkage between Center resources and activities designed to meet educational needs: (2) providing timely input to assist decision makers; and (3) determining and reporting the results of Center activities to clients, the public and interested agencies. The model

reflects a systems approach. Accomplishment of organizational goals is supported by evidence of achievement of divisional objectives, program objectives and Center activities (see Figure I). Success of an incremental procedure such as this is dependent upon a number of factors.

- The Center correctly assesses needs which it should address
- Center goals clearly define the targeted needs
- Programs accurately focus on the identified needs
- Objectives are stated in a manner which when achieved will attest to meeting the identified needs
- Activities effectively and efficiently provide for accomplishment of objectives
- Evidence of achievement validly relates to objectives
- Evaluative information is accurate, available and consumed by decision makers

In addition to the above, it is important that employees of the ESC recognize and accept the worth of the accountability concept. They must be committed to assisting the Center attain its goals, be cognizant of the relationship between goals, programs and activities and realize the importance of documenting accomplishment of goals. Successful implementation of the model can be achieved only with full cooperation from all staff. Realizing this, care was taken to involve ESC staff members in development of the model.

Phases of the system, organized according to functional relationships, consider the numerous tasks which must be accomplished to organize and maintain the evaluation-accountability system. The system is cyclic; logically beginning with a needs assessment and proceding through a complete evaluation of the ESC. Since many Center programs are tied to different years, various phases are often occurring simultaneously. This

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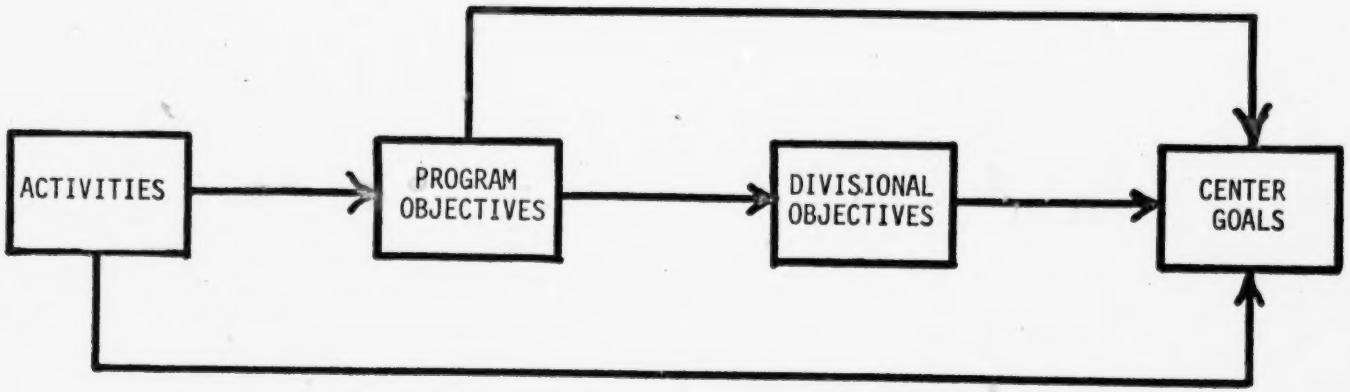


SOURCES OF EVIDENCE OF GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

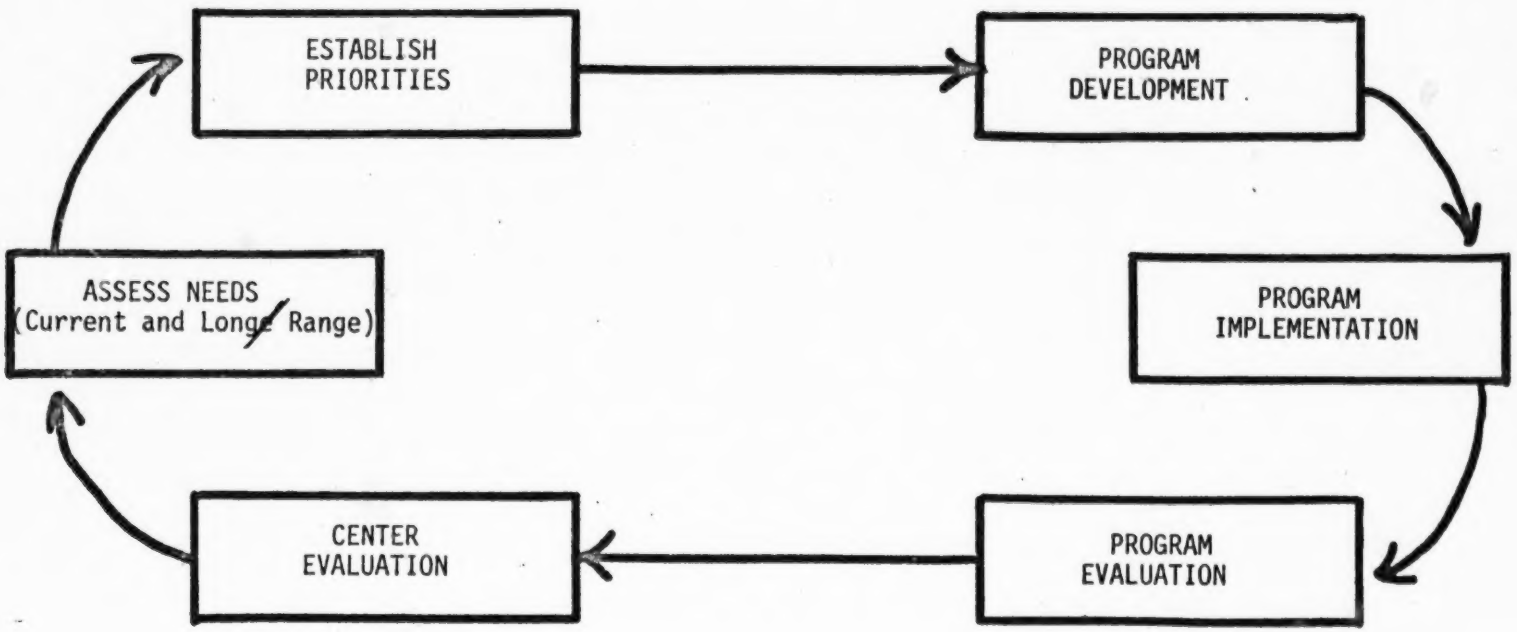
problem is overcome by maintaining a continuous evaluation for all programs and projects. This procedure, while certainly not perfect, does provide input from all programs when conducting the centerwide evaluation study. The evaluation-accountability model is graphically presented in Figure II.

Needs Assessment

Needs assessment is a critical phase of the evaluation-accountability model. The results of the needs assessment provide the rationale for operating all ESC programs, projects and activities. This phase of the model includes objectively identifying educational needs of clients and establishing an initial list of priorities. A wide variety of sources and methods are relied upon to obtain input relative to needs. Needs may be grossly categorized as being identified either by the ESC or by outside agencies. A need is defined as the discrepancy between an actual and a desired state of affairs (Alkins, 1970; Gottman and Clasen, 1972).

Region XIX operates a number of its programs to meet needs identified by outside agencies. The Texas Education Agency has mandated ESCs provide certain services to meet legislative requirements. Obviously, the Center acts to meet those requirements. The ESC also cooperates in many other programs initiated by the Agency. These programs are usually part of a statewide design to meet needs assessed by TEA. Region XIX also accepts national priorities as defined by such agencies as the U. S. Office of Education and the National Highway Safety Administration. The Center cooperates with these agencies by conducting programs financed through grants or contracts. Again, these activities are legitimized by needs assessment studies performed by the contracting agencies.

F I G U R E II



ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

In addition to utilizing the needs assessment information provided by outside agencies, Region XIX conducts its own comprehensive year-round needs assessment study. The study focuses on needs as they apply to local, regional, state, and national educational problems. A broad-based study such as this requires that data be gathered from a variety of sources. Sources regularly utilized include:

- The Texas Education Agency
- The U. S. Office of Education
- Local Education Agencies
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Governmental Agencies
- Professional Organizations
- The Joint Committee of the ESC
- The ESC Board of Director
- ESC Staff Members
- Community Organizations

Formal and informal communications between the above sources and Region XIX are used to identify needs and determine priorities. A systematic procedure is used to assure that needs identified throughout the year are recorded and considered in the Center's needs assessment study. This is achieved by each ESC division preparing and submitting a "Divisional Needs Assessment Report" to the Executive Director prior to May 1. The report includes a comprehensive list of needs which have been identified through interviews, conferences, surveys, observations, requests for services, etc. An initial priority rating for each need is also included in the report. Needs are first considered in terms of broad topic areas such as Career Education. Once areas are identified,

specific needs statements are written; e.g., "Students need access to accurate, timely career occupation information." This approach permits planners and decision makers to reference programs to specific problems within broad problem areas. Also included in the report is a statement documenting the existence of each identified need. This substantiates the inclusion of the topic area and/or the need statement. Using the above example, documentation of the topic area could be accomplished by placing "priority established by Commissioner Marland" in the appropriate column.

Establishing Center Priorities

The Executive Director of the ESC is responsible for establishing centerwide priorities. This annual activity confirms those needs which (1) are judged most pressing to clients, (2) are within the scope of the ESC, and (3) the Center is economically capable of addressing. The "Divisional Needs Assessment Reports" provide the major input for this phase of the evaluation-accountability system.

Needs, to this point, have been assessed within the framework of the various divisions. These must be woven together to provide a complete picture of needs, combining different topic areas or specific needs statements, redefining divisional responsibilities, and closely examining the availability of resources to meet needs. These activities result in need statements being assigned to categories according to their similarity. That is, needs are grouped on the basis of general headings they appear to be addressing. For example, statements reflecting needs in the area of professional training would be placed under that heading, regardless of the division which might be assigned the task of meeting the needs. This permits better coordination of resources to meet discrepancies.

Once need statements are categorized, priorities are placed upon the various groupings. Obviously, certain criteria must be followed in establishing needs according to priority. The following criteria are used by Region XIX:

1. Applicability to the region -- How widespread is this need area among participating school districts?

2. Congruence with state and national priorities--Is this need area important on a state and/or national level?

3. Center's role and capabilities--Can this need area be confronted by programs which legitimately fall within the scope of the Center's role? Does the Center have resources and personnel capable of conducting the necessary activities?

4. Present effort--Is the Center presently operating programs to ameliorate the need area? Will substantial "start-up" effort be required?

5. "Payoff" potential--Can we realistically expect to effect a change by addressing this area?

Utilization of the above criteria results in placing at the top of the priority list areas which have wide applicability, are important throughout the nation, are legitimately within the scope of the ESC, will require a start-up effort and can effectively be addressed. Thus, the Center does not make a purely subjective estimate of which needs are most "important." Consequently, an area mandated by the Texas Education Agency, supported by grants, and/or presently receiving a substantial effort from the Center may be assigned a lower priority than an area in which few if any programs are being operated. This occurrence indicates our concern to "trigger" action in areas showing the greatest discrepancy between an "ideal" and "actual" state.

Program Development

Phases included in the evaluation-accountability model can be classified as being primarily concerned with (1) planning or (2) implementation. Program development constitutes the bulk of the planning

or developmental stage of the model. Completion of this phase results in the translation of targeted needs into viable programs to meet those needs. Center programs represent the strategies used to remedy problems and meet client needs.

The importance of evaluation is attested to by the title of the paradigm. Plans for evaluation must be determined prior to program implementation if the evaluation is to be of maximum value (Gold, 1971). The Region XIX model requires strategies for evaluating programs concurrently with the operation of each program. This has the effect of integrating an evaluation component into each program.

The program development phase of the evaluation-accountability model is composed of a number of discrete, yet highly related tasks. Tasks, in sequential order, are: (1) stating divisional objectives; (2) stating performance objectives of all programs; (3) selecting activities to achieve stated objectives; (4) developing the program evaluation plan; and (5) completing a program evaluation guide.

Divisional Objectives. All programs are developed for the purpose of meeting selected needs of clients. Divisional objectives are utilized as the mechanism by which the ESC states its commitment to meet those needs. Broad objective statements are generated for each of the Center's programs. The general intent of a particular program is stated in the form of a single extensive objective. Essentially, this statement can be taken as the purpose of the program. Directors are responsible for developing objectives which reflect a resolution to confront each of the topic areas within the division's jurisdiction. Taken collectively, these statements constitute divisional objectives and detail problem areas being pursued by the division. An accurate picture of Center objectives is presented by combining all divisional objectives.

Performance Objectives. Objectives, stated in terms of performance or behavioral outcomes, constitute the heart of the entire evaluation-accountability model. A number of performance objectives, stated in measurable terms, are written for the needs a program is designed to meet. Who, does what, under what condition and with what level of performance is clearly and precisely specified in each performance objective. The ability to measure accomplishment of these objectives is essential. The achievement of a program's performance objectives provides evidence that the broadly stated divisional objectives and, consequently, targeted needs are being met.

Performance objectives of a program may be stated in terms of product or process. However, product referenced objectives stated in terms of client output are preferred. Process objectives are normally used when expressing Center activities specifically mandated or requested by outside agencies.

The sequential approach of the evaluation-accountability model demands that all performance objectives validly relate to the targeted needs. That is, accomplishment of the objectives truly indicates identified needs are being met. Obviously, the ability to measure an objective is relatively unimportant if that objective cannot be taken as evidence that a need is actually being met.

Selecting Activities. Activities are vehicles for achieving objectives. They express what the Center is doing to meet client needs. Activities usually take the form of workshops, consulting services, disseminating materials, visitations, conducting special classes, developing materials, providing special services, etc. Since activities constitute ESC input to meet needs, particular emphasis is placed on selecting the "best" possible alternatives! This demands

that a number of strategies be considered as possibilities for meeting objectives. Activities are then selected by systematically considering the various alternatives. Activities chosen appear to hold the best "payoff" potential. That is, the relationship between expenditure and achievement is most favorable. Potential is determined on the basis of experience, past evaluations, available resources, client desires and an analysis of Center and client capabilities. Selected activities are closely monitored and may be modified or eliminated as a result of intermediate evaluation findings.

Planning for Evaluation. All programs operated by the ESC are subject to a comprehensive ongoing evaluation. As earlier stated, provisions for evaluation are made concurrently with program planning. The details necessary for program implementation and evaluation are specified on Planning and Evaluation Guides (PEGs). A PEG is completed by the appropriate division director for each program conducted by Region XIX.

Planning and Evaluation Guides are designed to contain the information necessary to effectively evaluate the extent to which the Center is meeting its goals. PEGs are also "working" documents to assist directors in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating their programs. Completion of the PEG assures that plans have been formulated for implementing and evaluating the program. Essentially, the PEG provides a format which ties goals, objectives, activities, and resources together. It also specifies data collection plans, evidence which will be accepted as achieving each objective, and instrumentation necessary for evaluation. A copy of the Planning and Evaluation Guide is presented later in this document.

The PEG is divided into six separate sections. Sections I and II are largely composed of items requesting background information about the program. Section II also provides for listing reports which will be required, where the reports are to be submitted and their due dates. This information is extremely important since future funding for a program is often dependent upon the ability an organization demonstrates to manage itself. One indication of ability is the timely submission of quality reports.

Section III is a discussion of the problem being addressed by the program. The need which legitimized objectives, activities and resources is specified in this section.

Section IV is a statement of the purpose of the program. This section indicates how the needs discussed in Section III can be met by operating the proposed program. This part of the PEG is the divisional objective of the program.

Section V presents the performance objectives, activities designed to meet the objectives, what evidence will be accepted as achieving the objectives and how, when and by whom data will be collected. Section V clearly details the entire evaluation plan for the program.

Section VI ties resources to objectives. It permits decisions to be made relative to the cost-effectiveness of the program. Costs, expressed in terms of human and other resources, are tied to each objective. All individuals working to attain an objective are named, their specific duties listed, the amount of time they will spend toward achieving the objective specified, their hourly salary indicated and the toal cost of their time spent on this objective calculated. Other costs such as supplies, equipment, travel, etc. are also presented. Adding the amounts estimated for human resources and other expenses gives an indication of how much it costs to

achieve each objectives. A separate page is completed for each objective of the program. Completing the costs for each objective gives an indication of the total amount to be spent on the program.

Program Implementation

The developmental phases previously discussed dealt with assessing needs, setting priorities and planning programs to meet the targeted needs. Completion of these phases provides the foundation necessary to successfully implement ESC programs. The major portion of the implementation phase is comprised of actually performing the activities designed to permit accomplishment of stated objectives.

Directors are responsible for monitoring all programs within their divisions. Specific tasks in this phase include keeping programs on schedule, supervising program activities, maximizing linkage between complementary programs, managing program expenditures, conducting intermediate evaluations, and maintaining the data collection and reporting system. Planning and Evaluation Guides provide most of the information necessary to monitor ESC programs.

Program Evaluation

This phase of the accountability system is formally conducted at the completion of each program's fiscal year. However, as indicated throughout this document, evaluation is an ongoing process. Consequently, while the evaluation process is not final until after the end of the fiscal year, judgments pertinent to achievement of objectives are made while the program is operative.

A major purpose of evaluation is to improve managerial decisions. Continuous evaluation of programs permits directors to manipulate their resources and activities to achieve optimum output in terms of objective

attainment. Collecting and analyzing objective attainment data throughout the year also avoids the pitfall of conducting "shallow" perfunctory evaluations which do little but perpetuate biases. In essence, the final evaluation should largely be a compilation of data collected and analyzed throughout the year. The final evaluations provide the input necessary to conduct the annual Region XIX ESC evaluation.

Center Evaluation

The final phase of the accountability system is the Annual Region XIX ESC Evaluation. Results of the evaluations conducted for each program provide the data necessary to judge the extent to which the Center accomplished its goals and objectives. The Center evaluation considers the extent to which each of the divisions was able to meet its objectives. In addition, careful consideration is given to the cost-effectiveness of the various programs operated by the divisions.

Results of the Annual Region XIX ESC Evaluation also provide the direction for establishing centerwide goals for the next year. Programs which have been particularly successful in meeting their objectives can be continued or replaced by those designed to meet newly targeted needs. Programs which have not been successful can be modified or eliminated.

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DIVISIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT -- PART A

Region XIX Education Service Center

ESC Division: _____ Date: _____

Personnel Completing Needs Assessment: _____

_____

_____

_____

The following activities were conducted to determine the needs assessment:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Areas of High Priority: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Areas of Low Priority: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

DIVISIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR 1972-73 -- PART B

(A separate form should be completed for <u>each</u> need topic identified in Part A)

ESC Division: _____ Date: _____

	Priority	
	High	Low
Topic or Area: _____	___	___

Statement of Needs:

_____	___	___
_____	___	___
_____	___	___
_____	___	___
_____	___	___
_____	___	___
_____	___	___
_____	___	___

The existence of the above need statements are documented by:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Programs, projects or activities capable of meeting these needs include:

_____

_____

_____

_____

PLANNING - EVALUATION GUIDE - FY 1972-73

Region XIX Education Service Center
El Paso, Texas

I. _____ _____ _____ _____
Title of Program/Project | Program/Project Manager | ESC Division | Date Prepared

_____ _____ _____
Source of Funds | Total Amount of Funds | Inclusive Dates for Which Funds are Available

II. A. Was the program/project included in last year's TEA approved C/A? __Yes __No If YES, Page #__

B. Is the program/project to be included in this year's TEA approved C/A? __Yes __No

C. Has the program/project been formally evaluated in the past? __Yes __No

D. How many years has the Center conducted this program/project? ___Years

E. Will funds be available to continue the program/project next year? __Yes __No
(If NO, identify other potential sources of funds: _____)

F. Does this year's program/project have the same general purpose as last year's? __Yes __No __N/A

G. Does this year's program/project have substantially different performance objectives from last year's? __Yes __No __N/A

H. Are this year's activities similar to last year's? __Yes __No

I. Did last year's evaluation provide input in planning this year's program? __Yes __No
(Elaborate: _____)

J. Does the program/project require interim reports? __Yes __No __Likely, but presently unknown

K. Reports required:

Title of Report	Submitted to	Due Date

III. Statement of the problem
(This section should comprehensively discuss the needs the program/project is based upon)

IV. What is the overall purpose of the program/project? (Divisional Objective)

Objectives	Activities	EVALUATION PLANS	
		Evidence of Achievement	Data Collection

COSTING BY OBJECTIVE

A. Statement of Performance Objective: _____

_____

B. Human Resources (Professional and Supportive - ESC only)

Name	Responsibility	Man Hours	Rate	Costs
TOTALS for Personnel				

C. Other Costs

Description of Costs	Estimated Costs

D. It is estimated achievement of this objective will cost: _____

SUMMARY OF COSTING FOR PROGRAM/PROJECT

A. Title of Program/Project _____

B. Human Resources (Include all professional and supportive staff involved in the Program/Project; do not include consultants).

Name	Title	Man Hours	Rate	Costs

Subtotal A _____

C. Other Costs (Total)

Description of Cost	Estimated Cost

Subtotal B _____

D. Estimated Costs of Total Program/Project

Total Costs (Subtotal A & B) = _____